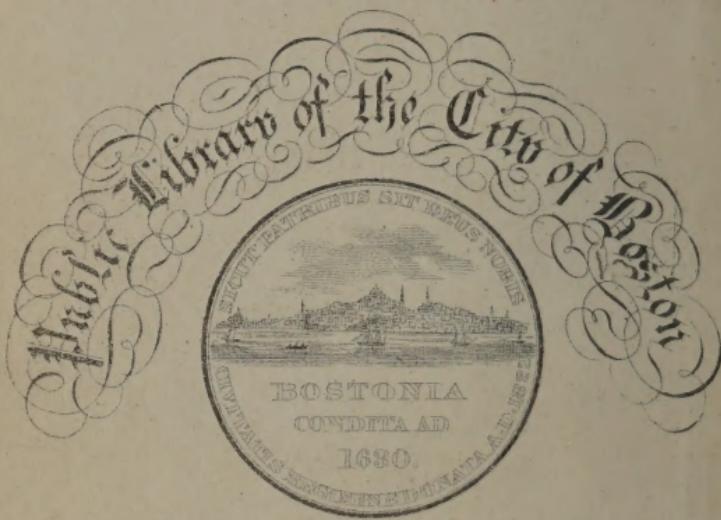


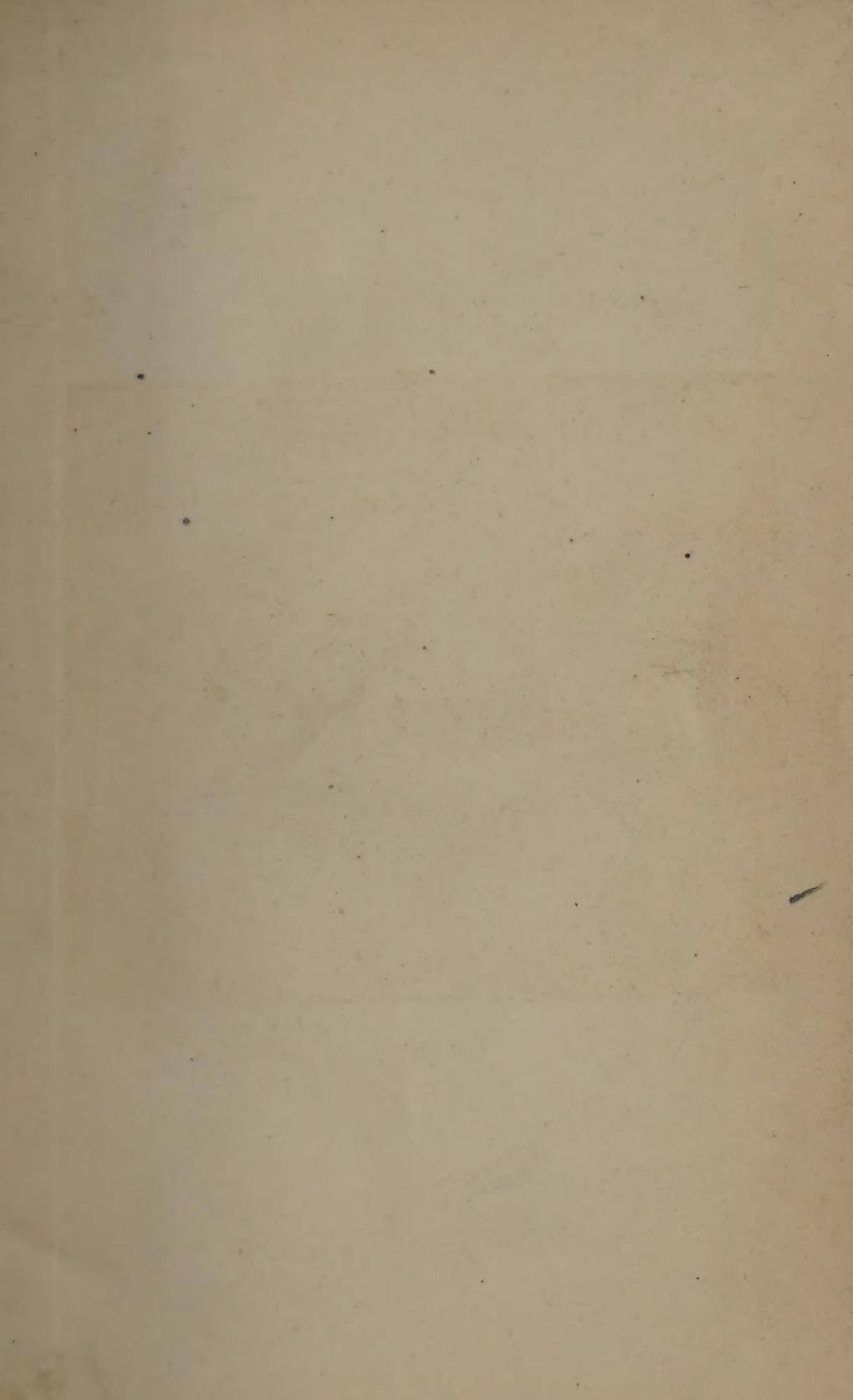
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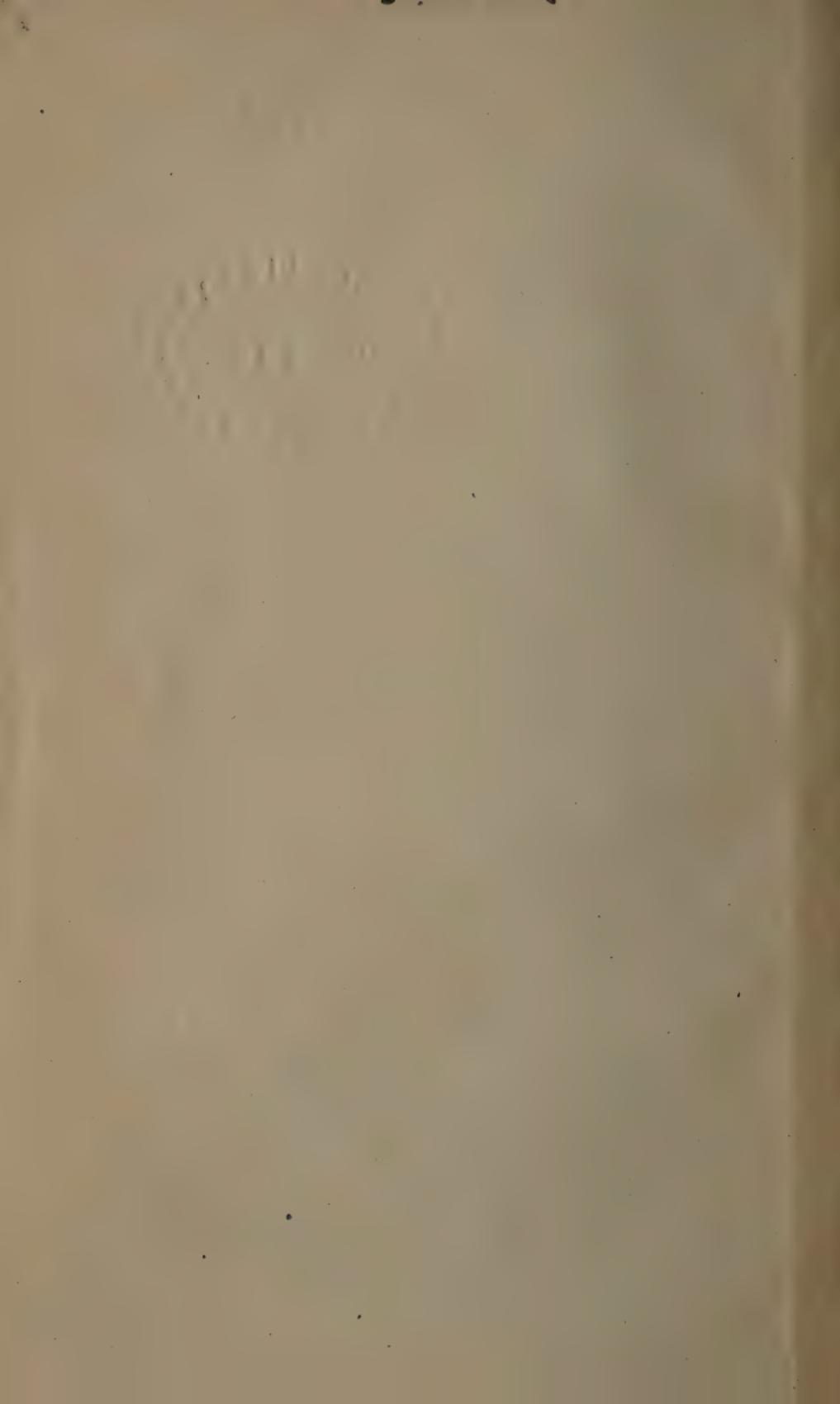
A SERMON DELIVERED AT EMMANUEL CHURCH,
APRIL 24, 1864,

BY THE
REV. F. D. HUNTINGTON, D. D.
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PERSONAL HUMILIATION

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“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God.”—
1 PETER V. 6.

IN the course of the Scriptures that we read to-day, one word is found, more than once, which is in strange contrast with the whole public condition of things around us. This word is “peace.” It was written as a promise, by a prophet. It was written in times not entirely unlike these times that have fallen upon us. Attend a little to this remarkable parallel. There was war, actual war, and there were rumors of more wars. The original unity of the nation was broken up. “He hath changed the portion of my people, and divided our fields.” The sundered parts, embittered with mutual jealousy and hatred, were struggling for the supremacy. There were threats of foreign intervention and invasion from the East. Yet there was no religious humiliation. Instead of looking, on their knees, to the Almighty God of their fathers, who had always

befriended and been patient with them, instead of propitiating him by penitence, abandoning their selfish and headstrong schemes, they were trusting to themselves, boasting of their weapons and skill, and living in guilty luxury. A majority were bent upon gain and pleasure, even at the cost of blood and misery to their neighbors. The land was full of a rapacious avarice and a reeking corruption, covered over with a thin crust of tawdry prosperity. "They covet fields," says Micah, "and take them by violence; they oppress a man and his house and his heritage." They starve the poor laborer, and "pluck off the flesh from his bones." As to the heads and legislators of the country, instead of being its sober guardians and disinterested patriots, righting the wronged, and governing impartially, they were spending their time in plots of private or party promotion, in drunkenness, harlotry, and untimely feasting. False prophets, pretending to piety, fawned upon their villainy, afraid to rebuke it. "If a man walking in falsehood do lie, saying, 'I will prophesy unto thee of wine and strong drink,' even he shall be the prophet of this people." "The princes judge for reward, and the priests teach for hire, and the prophets divine for money. Yet they say, Is not the Lord among us? None evil can come upon us." "They do evil with both hands earnestly. The best of them is as a brier. They practise iniquity because it is in the power of their hand."

Into this vivid description of both the national and the personal depravity, however, there breaks another and a still more awful strain from this prophet's lips. All along through his inspired message, at intervals, fall direct declarations that the everlasting God of all justice and judgment is not indifferent to these insults. He notices them all, remembers them all, and will reckon for them in righteousness. Hear a few of these solemn sentences,— they belong to the American people now just as much as to the Hebrew people then ; we have sinned against even a clearer light and a better faith than theirs ; we have wandered from a nobler beginning and a fairer heritage ; we have been unthankful for a providential history more brilliant and more gracious ; and so, as surely as God lives, we shall have to hear the substance of these sentences, one day or another. The sooner we listen to them, the less the punishment and the suffering they will bring : “ Hearken, O Earth, and all ye people ; let the Lord God be witness against you from his holy temple. Behold, the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under Him, and the valleys shall be cleft. The Lord hath a controversy with his people, and He will plead with Israel. O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee ? For I brought thee up and redeemed thee. Therefore also will I make thee

sick in smiting thee, making thee desolate because of thy sins. Thy casting down shall be in the midst of thee," — internal insurrection. "A man's enemies are the men of his own house." The land shall be "ploughed as a field," with the iron implements of havoc. "Thou shalt sow but thou shalt not reap. Thou shalt no more worship the work of thine hands. I will cut off witchcrafts, and thou shalt have no more soothsayers. Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners cover their lips ; for there is no answer of God."

Now, my friends, as the conditions remain the same to this country as to Judea, so, it seems very plain, the message and the messenger's duty must be essentially the same. As a people, we do not believe these sentences, that I have just repeated, will be executed upon us. But why not? If God is unchangeable ; if He lives and reigns, not only in Heaven but on earth, now as then ; if the principles of justice, truth, and mercy between man and man are unaltered in their sacredness ; if national retribution is a reality and not a phantom ; if our religion, our Bible, and our Church are not one complete illusion ; and if our moral history shows that we have no deservings to set us above God's favored and peculiar people of old, — then why should not the judgment and the suffering come?

In the opinion of the greater number of thinking men, I believe, in both military and civil stations, including those most likely to be informed, our

armies, and the nation behind them, are standing at this moment on the eve of some great collision with the enemy. No man, to be sure, can say this with certainty. The future course of the war cannot be positively foretold an hour. Events, wholly unexpected, may turn the whole drift of preparation out of its present channels. But this, to reasonable minds, is unquestionably the near prospect. After an interval of comparative quiet, we seem to be approaching one of those critical and fearful turns of campaign and battle where the vast fortunes and interests of a kingdom have often been gathered up for a plunge of revolution in some dreadful “valley of decision.” Long processes of planning, accumulation, transporting and concentration of forces, are about coming, on both sides, to their maturity and their trial. It would appear as if the people must be hushed with awe, as nature seems to be before the crash of the thundergust from the full magazines of the sultry air. If it pleases God that, whether for past wickedness or present indifference, we fail now,—if the Winter that is now melting from the mountains shall settle in again, when the Summer is ended, over abandoned territory and retreating regiments,—if the hopes that are springing with the April violets are withered when the harvest is passed,—then he must be bold and sanguine who can look forward to anything better than protracted alienations and exhausting conflicts, with resources enfeebled by discords amongst ourselves. Or, if the

Great Disposer, who giveth not alway the battle to the strong, shall prosper us on the field, it will still be no occasion for childish mirth or noisy jubilation, all our wounds being instantly healed, and all perplexities at rest;—on the contrary, problems of tremendous trouble will impend over government and people, to be solved only with sober, manly wisdom, probably with sacrifice and pain.

Brethren, if this be so, then I count it very plain that this nation should be, this day, from end to end, and from side to side, in all its houses, and all its assemblies, and all its closets, in no careless, frivolous frame, but in a posture of contrite confession and lowly supplication, humbling itself, as the text says, under the mighty hand of God. The issue is not one of transient policies, of more or fewer millions of taxation, of a score or two of hard or luxurious years; of the coming in or going out of party administrations, or of some light measures of local legislation. It involves high and lasting concerns, pertaining to religion itself, to the welfare and progress of Christ's kingdom on the earth, to domestic security and purity, to liberty and order, to whatever makes man's life noble for generations to come. How, then, is it possible that we should stand on this verge of awful destinies, trifling, grasping, dancing and making merry, as if it were all a masquerade of pleasure-seekers to vanish in a night?

Look a little farther at this prospect, for it is in-

contestable that in a few days we shall have to look at some features of it, not in anticipation, but face to face. For, hostile armies, numbered by hundreds of thousands of soldiers, officered by determined and exasperated leaders, with national life, pride, and honor at stake, do not meet and part without making the earth groan under them, and far around them. If you leave, therefore, the great moral considerations I have referred to, and pass on to call up and prefigure the separate and particular shapes of terrible anguish which are to darken and distress the land, the moment these waiting collisions come, these sleeping monsters of armies wake and uncoil, and the lightnings are loosened,—anguish on the battle-field, in the heats and thirst of the sun and the chill of night; anguish by shot and shell and sabre and horses' hoofs; anguish in ambulances and hospitals; anguish in thousands and tens of thousands of desolated homes all over these mourning States,—why, if we are creatures of sympathy or sensibility at all, is it not enough to subdue our frivolity and to restrain this eager chase for ostentatious riches? Think of the young men, whose lives are now so generous a part of the living glory of the country, whose dead bodies these mortal engagements must require as their cruel sacrifice! It would seem as if that thought alone were enough to make a nation sober,—bowing itself under God's mighty hand.

But how is it? No one of you needs to be told

how it is. There is scarcely a difference of judgment on the common statement that, throughout the country, there never has been, from the first, a more inflated estimate of material and external property than now; a more absorbing and heated pursuit of wealth; a more lavish display of it; a freer indulgence in amusement and in extravagant forms of living; or more frequent instances of official and private management to thrive on the calamities, costs, and necessities of the Government. What wonder if some whispers of discontent creep through the encampments of the army and the cabins of the navy? From the capital, through all our large cities and seats of commerce, out to the remotest hamlets, and from rulers in the highest stations to subjects in the meanest, men are calculating the profits of their opportunity. There is, to say the least, no abatement in any kind of vice or profligacy, in fraud, in profanity, in gambling, in contempt of the Lord's Day, in all descriptions of sensuality. Making all allowance for benevolent alleviations of the sufferings of soldiers, these facts yet remain undisputed. In other words, dropping specifications, we must agree in this:—That religious humility and that reverence which the nation's God designs by his discipline, and demands in his Word, are not generally produced. We are not repentant. We are not sobered. We are not on our knees. We are not a people bringing forth fruits meet for repentance. How can we help recalling the sharp and searching menaces of the

Scriptures? Why should it not be said by the Judge here, as again and again of another favored and ungrateful kingdom, "Shall I not visit them for these things, saith the Lord? Shall I not be avenged on such a nation as this?" "The nation that will not serve me shall perish." It is often observed how like a wild and preposterous dream it would have seemed, if, four years ago, any human being had predicted the present actual condition,—military, social, and financial,—of this country. But I believe it would have struck almost every sane mind then as equally incredible, that, such a condition being supposed as possible, the people would not have been brought by it to a deeper feeling of their dependence, their danger, and their sin,—humbled under the mighty hand of God.

These reflections would all be unavailing and unprofitable, if there were nothing for us, individually and directly, to do except to utter them. But, on the contrary, there is not one amongst us all who has not some direct and individual responsibility for the wrong, and some power to set it right. Indeed, if there is any such thing to be hoped for as a reformation that will avert God's vexing us with his storms of retribution it must come about by no other way in the world than just this simple correction and turning of personal hearts and lives, one by one, family by family, all over the land, back to God,—heartily humbling themselves under his mighty hand.

Nor is this urgent duty left in any vague and

shapeless cloud of sentiment. It lies in distinct and palpable steps,— plain and simple as any other steps in a Christian's walk with God.

Understand that nothing in lawful natural enterprise is precluded, or to be omitted. Doubtless every citizen must do everything in his ability, according to the obvious rules and common-sense conditions of success, to render this impending movement physically powerful. As a true patriot, and a true Christian,— and it cannot be too often repeated that he can never be a true Christian without being a true patriot,— he will uphold and help the forces that represent the faith that is in him and the cause he holds right and dear, by his gifts, by his daily speech, by his public spirit and attention to the public interest, by all cheerful, patient, prompt, untiring sacrifices. This he will do. He will act up to the spirit of the prophet's own ringing call in this book: “Gather thyself in troops.” “Wake up the mighty men; let all the men of war draw near.”

But, doing this, there will be much more that he will not dare to leave undone: because *this* will be done not for men but for God. He will check all extravagant expenditure in personal habits, in domestic display, in the whole style of life. In wholesome self-command and yoking of the flesh, whether it be appetite, or ambition, or vanity, or conformity to fashion that he has to bring under, he will be equal to the cross. And this he will do, not so much from any motives of thrift or political economy, not so much to secure himself against

pecuniary peril, or in doubtful attempts to coerce suddenly the currents of traffic — attempts that are apt to make more mischief than they mend — as simply to express by this stern denial of the lower nature, his devout sense of the heaviness of God's hand upon the people. If thereby he shall increase sympathy with the needier classes, and so encourage them, and create confidence among them, binding the whole body politic more harmoniously together; if he shall reassure the suffering soldier in field and camp with the feeling that his pain and privation are not mocked by reckless self-indulgence here, or if he shall enlarge his own free-will offerings for Christ's Treasury, as in every Fast we ought to do, — more especially now for the religious strengthening and comfort of the soldiers themselves, — so much the better it will be. But I mean that this narrower, plainer manner of living is wanted primarily as the token of a purpose to walk humbly with God, and to gain a closer and more childlike fellowship with his offended yet condescending Spirit.

Next to this abatement of outward extravagance, or along with it, will be found a redoubled devotion to all the offices of worship and charity. It needs no demonstration to prove that when men's souls are really touched with penitential tenderness and spiritual self-rebuke, they spontaneously betake themselves to the sanctuaries, the nurseries, and the exercises of their faith. Natural instincts prompt it. The Bible sanctions and expects it. When-

ever, as a people, we are really humbled under the mighty hand of God's discipline, instead of seeking entertainments men and women will seek retirement; they will be less abroad and more at home; less on exhibition, and more in recollection. They will be more constant and less formal, more cordial and less critical, in the solemn services of God's Church, loving its gates, and glad to enter in when they are open. The nature of a devout and humble mind must have changed very much since the Scriptures were written, if, in looking forward to the season of blood and sorrow that is before us, really good men do not feel it to be safer and wiser to be wherever prayer is wont to be made, in Church or in Chapel, on hallowed days or any days, than in pleasure-parties or convivial clubs or an unremitting application to this world's business. Whatever else we do for the torn and bleeding country, we must pray for it. Whatever else we leave undone, we must urge our petitions to the God of forgiveness, the God of concord and unity, and the God of victory, for it. However else we fail, we shall never really fail in intercessions for the right and for the defenders of it, for magistrates and chiefs, and for all the people, before Him who heareth prayer, and who made Israel to prevail while the commander's arms were lifted up in supplication. Whatever obstacles, divisions, or delays lie before us in the way, it is God alone, as to-day's Collect reminds us, who "among the sundry and manifold changes of the world," can "order the unruly wills

and affections of 'sinful men,'" or "make men to be of one mind in a house;"—and the only power on earth that can move His arm is the humble prayer of his children.

Under all these special acts of lowly submission, my dear friends, it is the spirit only that avails. It is *that* God regards, and without it He sees that we are dissemblers. If we really feel our dependence, and if the mighty Hand has humbled us, then, not only in outer signs but in the inward life, there will be a changed, a chastened, and a reverent frame, stamping, with its serious and spiritual impress, the manners and dress of society, the conversation, the bargaining, and the whole public behavior of the nation.

In this book of the Prophet Micah, observe, all the promises of peace are bound up with the coming and Faith of Jesus Christ, the Messiah and the Saviour. After the strifes, the judgments, and the agonies, peace *may* be restored; but it can be only on one and no other condition,—that it flows from this Divine Lord enthroned in the heart and over the life of the people. The "remnant may return, and be as a dew from the Lord, and as showers upon the grass," but it will be only because out of little Bethlehem "shall come a Ruler," "a Man that shall be the peace," "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Men may yet beat their swords into ploughshares, but this will only be as they listen to Him who publisheth a peace given "not as the world giveth" to the

repenting soul ; and only as they walk in the light of Him who breaketh down the middle-wall of partition, to reconcile all things to himself, consecrating their gain and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth.

Without Him we can see no assurance of prosperity, or even of the preservation of the Government. I know it is customary for our orators to finish their popular appeals with pictures of a predestined and matchless glory for our Republic. It may result so. God grant it ! Hope is certainly better for us than despair. But of this one thing God himself in his Law makes us sure,— There is no permanent glory or even deliverance for us, except the nation repents and puts a lowly, self-renouncing faith in its Divine Founder and Redeemer.

We need not inquire, then, as if we never had been told, “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God ?” For “He hath showed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God ?” The Prophet, in the Lesson, and the Apostle, in the text, meet and agree : “Walk humbly with thy God ;”— “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand.” Where this spirit is — the spirit of Him who humbled himself even to the death on the cross — there is liberty, everlasting liberty. That, and that alone, will make America a Holy Land, and the Republic a province of the Kingdom that never can be moved.

